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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KMCA](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADER WANTS MORE SAY IN HOW MCC MONEY IS SPENT

REF: A. Maseru 388 B. Maseru 376

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Summary

1. On Friday, October 30, Ambassador Rob Nolan met with Kelebone Maope, Member of Parliament and leader of opposition political party the Lesotho People's Congress. Maope expressed concern that poor citizens of Lesotho will be exploited under the current version of the Land Bill (ref A). He felt that the Millennium Challenge Compact didn't adequately take into account the desires of the common people of Lesotho. Maope claimed that people don't realize the government of Lesotho proposed the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) activities. He said, "we look on MCA as an American project." The Ambassador agreed to address the issue of America's role in Compact implementation when he meets with opposition leaders on Thursday, November 5. Finally, Maope voiced concern that a new Public Meetings Act is being debated in Parliament as a way to silence public debate about the Land Bill.

Strong cultural attachment to land adds layer of difficulty to Land Bill process

2. Maope conceded that Lesotho does need land reform. However, for the people of Lesotho, land is a cultural issue which is particularly sensitive given the history of the Kingdom. When Dutch settlers arrived in the area, they gradually encroached on Basotho land, and the country was only able to keep its sovereignty by becoming a protectorate of Britain. The lands in South Africa that the Kingdom lost are still known as the "Conquered Territories." Under the constitution, the King is the trustee and caretaker of the land. Maope worries that under the new law, the poor would lose the protection of the King. He thinks that many would sell their land for the immediate monetary gain, and would then have nowhere to go and no economic assets. For those who choose to keep their land, he is concerned that they would be over-burdened by new taxes that they cannot afford to pay.

Opposition would like more influence in how money is spent

3. Maope would like to see donor money spent on improving land, building proper settlements, and encouraging urban planning, instead of going toward land reform. He insinuated that the people of Lesotho were not adequately consulted during the conception stage of the compact; instead, the government of

Lesotho chose the compact activities. He actually went so far as to request "re-orientation" of MCA money, and further consultations so that a consensus can be reached between the GOL and opposition parties. He mentioned several times during the meeting that certain issues, like soil erosion, are not being addressed, implying that there are other, more important priorities which have been ignored in favor of the Land Bill. He also stated that the Parliament's request for input from the public between now and November 12 is "not a genuine effort" to get feedback.

Public Meetings Act an attempt to silence debate?

14. Parliament is currently considering a Public Meetings Act (ref B). Maope strongly feels that the act is connected to the very vigorous public debate on the Land Bill. He thinks that because of this discussion, GOL decided that it needed to curb public meetings about political issues. If the new bill passes, organizations (with certain exceptions) will be required to request permission to hold public meetings. Currently, the only requirement is to inform authorities that a meeting is being planned.

Post's reaction and comment

15. Ambassador Nolan repeated the message that the United States is not pushing the Land Bill legislation, and if Lesotho is not ready for land reform, we respect that. He stressed that the U.S. and Lesotho are strong friends, and understand that this is a very culturally sensitive issue. We continue to encourage this healthy political debate, which is one of the few truly important political issues to be debated in Lesotho over the last two years. Ambassador Nolan reminded Maope that the

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overall objective of MCC activities is to reduce poverty, and while a Land Bill is required to create a legal framework for MCA land activities, if Lesotho isn't ready, the land activity can be canceled. While we welcome the meetings that we have been holding with opposition leaders, we are very aware that this issue is the most popular "political football" of the moment, and will continue to be misconstrued purposefully if it can help opposition politicians to gain traction with their constituencies. Post will continue to track this situation and will adjust our public diplomacy strategy as needed to deal with any political fallout of this sensitive issue.

NOLAN